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TO :

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ORGANIZED CRIME
MAHEU, ROBERT
KENNEDY, ROBERT
ANTI-CASTRO ACTIVITIES
GIANCANA, SAM
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COMMISSION ON CIA ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE UNITED STATES

Washington, DC 20500

April 9, 1975

MEMORANDUM

Tape: 178-10004-10391

TO : The File

Transcript: 178-10002-10352

FROM : David W. Belin

SUBJECT : Interview with Colonel Sheffield Edwards

Mr. Belin: We're here in your lovely home on April 9 (1975). We've had a brief conversation, and I have told you what I am going to do is to have my secretary transcribe our conversation, mail it to you for any corrections and then keep it a part of the record. Right now I'll ask you to tell me what your mailing address is.

Col. Edwards: My mailing address is Route 2, Box 388, Leesburg, Virginia.

B: Is there a zip code on it?

E: 22075

B: All right. Let me stop now and see if this recording is working. Colonel Edwards, you're a graduate of West Point, are you not?

E: Yes.

B: In the Class of 1923?

E: Yes.

B: And during World War II you first served with the Army Air Corps and then moved over to the regular army in the 12th Armory Group, a command position. Is that correct?

E: Yes.

B: Then after the war, what did you do?

E: After the war I joined the CIG first until it became the CIA in about 1947.

B: All right. And you worked with General Vandenberg then?

E: Yes. I worked with General Vandenberg.

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B: And then when you joined CIA you became head of the Office of Security. Is that correct?

E: Yes.

B: And you stayed with CIA until you retired?

E: Yes.

B: Do you remember when that was?

E: 1963.

B: Originally your Office of Security staff was relatively small. Is that correct?

E: That is true. About 35.

B: And when you left, how large had it grown?

E: To about 700.

B: All right. Now -- if you want to add anything, by the way, just go ahead and feel free to add. I asked you among other things with regard to a plan to try and assassinate a Cuban leader, particularly Castro. And I think you told me that your first contact with this was a request by Dick Bissell. Is that correct?

E: Yes.

B: Do you know approximately when that occurred?

E: I don't remember/it was about the time of the Bay of Pigs.

B: Was it before or after the Bay of Pigs, if you remember?

E: I don't remember exactly.

B: Do you know whether it was in the Eisenhower Administration or the Kennedy Administration?

E: It was in the Kennedy Administration.

B: What did Dick Bissell say to you? By the way, who was Dick Bissell?

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E: Bissell was the Deputy for Plans --which is now called the Deputy for Operations.

B: Among other things he was in charge of the whole Bay of Pigs operation. Is that correct?

E: That is correct.

B: Do you remember what he said to you - and what you said to him about this assassination plan?

E: Yes, I remember that. -- You had better turn off that thing --

B: All right.

B: All right. You wanted me to restate the question. What did he say to you, and what did you say to him?

E: Bissell asked me if I had any assets that would be available.

B: Did he say to be available for what?

E: That would be available into the syndicate.

B: All right. He asked you and what did you tell him?

E: I told him I would see.
then did

B: And subsequently/you determine an asset that you might have?

E: Right.

B: And who was that?

E: first
It was Bob Maheu/and then afterwards it was Johnnie Rosselli.

B: And Johnnie Rosselli was a person that was supposedly involved with the syndicate?

E: Yes.

B: Was there anyone other than Rosselli?

E: Samuel -- otherwise Sam Giancana

B: And who talked to Rosselli and Giancana? Was it Maheu at first, or you?

E: It was Maheu.

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B: Did you ever talk to either Rosselli or Giancana?

E: I never met Sam Giancana. | I talked with Johnnie on several occasions.

B: Who did you use as your case officer?

E: I used James O'Connell.

B: You told me in a prior conversation that whatever O'Connell did he did for you. Is that correct?

E: That is absolutely true and for anything he did, if there is any blame/ it is mine. That's the way we operate.

B: Now, basically, who was the target then?

E: The target was Castro.

B: And why did you feel -- or why did Bissell feel that it was appropriate to use the syndicate?

E: Because of the gambling interests of the syndicate in the Cuban mess.

B: They had -- there had been some question whether or not they could continue under Castro and therefore you thought the syndicate might be interested in getting rid of Castro.

E: That's right.

B: All right. Do you know the means by which they were going to try to get rid of Castro?

E: Yes. I know.

B: And what was that?

E: By placing botulism pills in his food.

B: And supposedly there was going to be a person that was going to get the pills over into Cuba to a restaurant which Castro frequented. Was that it?

E: Yes.

B: And do you remember the name of the person who was going to do that?

E: I believe it was Juan Orta.

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B: And do you know if the plan was carried out -the plan obviously didn't succeed since Castro is still living. Do you know if the pills ever got to Cuba?

E: No. Not of my own knowledge.

B: Do you know what happened to Orta? As to why he did or did not follow through with the plan?

E: Orta got scared.

B: Who was to get in contact with Orta? Was that the syndicate?

E: I don't remember.

B: All right. Well, Orta got scared -- was this still in 1961 when he got scared? The Bay of Pigs, by the way, was in the Spring of 1961.

E: I believe it was '61.

B: After he got scared, did you get involved with any other plans on the assassination or did this plan go on the shelf, or what happened to it?

E: The plan, as I recall, petered out.

B: And did you become involved with any other person to try to get these pills into Cuba?

E: No.

B: Now, who inside the Agency besides Bissell did you have any contact with on the top echelon.

E: Very important. The plan was approved by Alan W. Dulles and General Cabell.

B: So there was Alan Dulles who was the DCI.

E: Yes.

B: And General Cabell was his deputy.

E: That's right.

B: And then this Richard Bissell.

E: That's right.

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B: Now, at some subsequent time did you ever have occasion to brief anyone in the Administration or the Government about this plan?

E: I briefed Mr. Harvey.

B: That was inside the Agency.

E: Yes.

B: Do you know whether or not Harvey --

E: Oh, oh, and I briefed Robert Kennedy.

B: Let me first talk about Mr. Harvey. Do you know whether or not Harvey was going to pick up the plan again at a later time or not?

E: I did not know.

B: OK. You briefed Robert Kennedy. Is that correct?

E: Right.

B: And who was with you at that briefing?

E: Robert Kennedy and Larry Houston.

B: And Larry Houston was General Counsel for the Agency. Is that correct?

E: Correct.

B: Had he known about this in '61 or did he become aware of it before the Kennedy briefing?

E: I briefed him before to the best of my recollection. I briefed him at the same time I briefed Papich.

B: All right. Now, that would have been in 1962 then. Is that correct?

E: Yeah.

B: It would have been shortly before you talked to Kennedy that you briefed Houston. Would that be correct?

E: Right.

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B: And when you briefed Robert Kennedy, what did you tell him?

E: I told him that -- this is all on the record, or should be --

B: There was a memorandum prepared of it?

E: Oh, yes. It should be on the record. I'd rather have you see that because it is verbatim.

B: Was there anything that you knew about this plan to assassinate Castro that you didn't tell Kennedy?

E: No.

B: I think in our discussions before we started this taping you said that you told him everything. Would that be?

E: That's right.

B: Do you know approximately how long the briefing session took?

E: About half an hour at least.

B: At least a half an hour. Do you know whether or not Robert Kennedy had any comment to you after you briefed him?

E: None to me. He cautioned Larry Houston to the effect that he was to know about these things. -- Words to that effect.

B: He said he wanted to know about these things. Did he tell you that you shouldn't do this at all?

E: No.

B: Did he in any way say that he disapproved of what had been done in the past?

E: No.

B: At the time that you briefed him, which I think the record shows was in May of 1962, did you know that Bill Harvey was undertaking another plan along these lines? Did you know that or --?

E: No. I did not know.

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B: And you didn't tell Attorney General Kennedy at the time. Is that right?

E: No.

B: Now, you mentioned these pills. Did you ever check the pills out to see whether or not they might dissolve or anything along that line?

E: I checked the pills on some guinea pigs.

B: Why did you check the pills?

E: Because I wanted to be sure they worked.

B: And, did they work on the guinea pigs?

E: They sure did.

B: The first time did they dissolve at all or not?

E: No.

B: All right, then what did you do, send them back to Technical Services Division?

E: Yes.

B: And then they got pills that --

E: Yes.

B: I think you told me in our conversation before we started taping that you always like to double-check things like that --

E: That's right.

B: Colonel Edwards, I asked you whether or not you knew of any subsequent plans after these plans that were dropped in 1961 and you said "no". Did you know of any plans other than the plans that involved the use of this botulism pills?

E: No.

B: Is there anything else that you can think of that might in any way be relevant or related to this matter that you would like to state for the record?

E: No.

B: Is there any question you can think of, whether I've asked it or not that in any way would involve this subject?

E: No. There is not--I mean--I would like to point out on the tape that I've been out of the Agency--kept away from it--for twelve years, so if there was something, I don't remember.

B: Do you know of any other attempt at assassination plots other than the Castro plot?

E: Absolutely nothing!

B: Do you have any suggestions or recommendations concerning making the Agency a more effective Agency just based upon your experience, an Agency that will do a good job of intelligence but will also protect the rights of Americans?

E: Bear in mind now that we are--it is all right to talk about the rights of Americans, but the rights of Communists is a separate subject to me.

B: People abroad, you mean?

E: Yes.

B: Colonel Edwards, I am just going to ask you one or two more questions. In your work in the Office of Security, were you aware of the fact that there had been some kind of wiretapping incident out in Las Vegas involving either Dan Rowan or Phyllis McGuire.

E: I knew of it from hearsay.

B: Do you remember who told you about it?

E: I think it was Bob Maheu.

B: Do you know anyone else outside of the Agency that might have known of any of these plans at the time that they were being undertaken to try and assassinate Castro?

E: What plans?

B: The plans that were being developed, trying to assassinate Castro. Was there anyone outside the Agency other than the syndicate people and the people they were getting--was there any person in the White House that you knew who knew about this?

E: Not that I know of and I am sure there were not.

B: You basically believe that this was a plan that was developed by whom then?

E: By Bissell--by Bissell.

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B: And you thought this was developed in connection with the Bay of Pigs?

E: Right

B: Do you know if Mr. McCone knew about this when he came in the Agency?

E: I don't know, but I don't think he did.

B: All right. Do you know whether or not Helms eventually knew of the plan?

E: Yes.

B: Helms did.

E: Yes.

B: I believe that's all. I'm going to turn the tape off now. Is there anything else you'd like to say for the tape?

E: No, I don't think so.

B: By the way, Helms did have knowledge of the briefing of Attorney General Kennedy, did he not?

E: I'm not sure.

B: OK. You don't know if it was. I'm going to say as a matter of fact I may have misled you because I have notes that indicate that he did not know of the time you briefed the Attorney General. Do you know anyone else that did know or did you just go over with Houston on that?

E: Just Houston and myself

B: And do you know if Attorney General Kennedy talked with anyone else in the Attorney General's office?

E: I don't know. I would imagine that he talked with Mr. Herbert Miller.

B: Do you know that of your own knowledge or you just think you do?

E: No, no.

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B: All right. Anything else you want to add for the record?

E: No.

B: All right. Thank you very much, Sir, for your cooperation.

E: Sure.

B: One last question, Mr. Edwards. Did you ever hear anyone say that there was a need to develop what was called an executive action capability on the part of the Agency which was defined as an ability to liquidate foreign leaders where it was required for American foreign policy?

E: No.

B: You never heard either the phrase "executive action capability" used?

E: No.

B: Did you ever hear the discussion/any need to develop a capability to be able to assassinate foreign leaders?

E: No.

B: And I think you said you don't know of any attempted plans to assassinate people other than the Castro target. Is that correct?

E: That is correct.

B: OK. Thank you.

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